

Aftermath

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Summary: The character interactions immediately following the destruction of the Book of Darkness's Defense Program. Because saving the world together doesn't suddenly mean everyone is friends, or that past transgressions are instantly forgotten. But it does mean that the process can finally start. [Complete, unless I ever feel like writing more.]

Aftermath

Signum was the first to notice Hayate faint, and therefore the one to catch her mistress when she began to fall from the cold winter sky.

Immediately, the other Wolkenritter surrounded her. Shamal immediately began her medical scans, while Vita kept screaming Hayate's name and threatening to get in the way. Zafira hovered close enough to watch, yet far enough away to give Shamal space, and discretely positioned himself to intervene if any of the Bureau mages came too close.

Signum noted that Hayate's hair had reverted to its natural shade of brown. According to the faintest whispers of old, old memories, that meant...

Indeed, a miniature star emerged from her mistress' chest, floating a short distance away before resuming the manifested form of the Book's Will. The Administrative Program newly-christened "Reinforce".

The twisted expression of grief and fear on the other woman's face did not reassure the Sword Knight, but she'd already half-remembered that a Unison Device could not maintain a fusion when the human host's health began to fail.

But Shamal's voice broke through, urgent but unshakable. "Vita, she's okay. She's alive, and the Book is no longer feeding upon her. Hayate is very weak right now, but I can keep her stabilized until we get her to a proper medical facility." The Knight of the Lake locked eyes

with her leader's. "A Bureau facility would be ideal."

Signum nodded. It was nothing they hadn't discussed before, and the circumstances would hardly get better than this.

She turned her eyes to Zafira, who needed no other prompting. He floated over and took their mistress from Signum's hands. Arms that could have effortlessly crushed Hayate on her best day handled her with the utmost gentleness, and he cradled her against his broad chest to ward away the snowy chill.

Signum turned to the administrative program, Reinforce, for a long-awaited confirmation. "They will demand that we turn over the Book of Darkness to be sealed. This will not be a problem, yes?"

The white-haired Unison Device nodded. "We five are all already manifested, with our programs operating independently under our own power and fueled by our own Linker Cores. Sealing the Book will not affect our manifestations. However, so long as the Book remains inoperable, it cannot resurrect any of us should we die, nor will it be able to record our experiences to pass on to the next manifestations. But at the same time, we need not fear anyone tampering with the Book, and we can be reasonably sure that the Bureau will not risk destroying it."

The General of Blazing Fire decreed, "Then the risks are acceptable."

Signum returned Laevantein to his standby form, and let him dangle from the chain she clutched lightly in her off-hand. So comparatively disarmed, she raised her hands in the universal gesture of surrender, and floated to a reserved distance in front of the Bureau enforcer.

"Chrono!" Testarossa protested, as the young man brandished his icy Device.

"On your guard, Fate," he warned her, never taking his eyes from Signum's. The Sword Knight approved.

"He is right, Testarossa," she said. "You may have forgotten, but we Wolkenritter are wanted and dangerous criminals."

He spoke up, "Yet I am to take it that you are surrendering to arrest now?"

"We live to serve our mistress. The Book's threat is ended, but even now her life is in danger. She needs your help. We gladly surrender our arms, our freedom, even our lives to you, as long as she receives your help right now."

He arched an eyebrow. "You would surrender and trust your mistress - the Mistress of the Book of Darkness - to our custody, while the lot of you are disarmed, bound, limited, and locked away from her and each other?" Signum could not stop the reflexive twitch of her sword hand's fingers, and he did not miss it. "To say nothing of being tried and convicted for your crimes?"

But Signum answered with the total conviction of one who had long accepted her course of action. "Without complaint, save that we would

be more assured if our medic were allowed to remain by her side, if only to better inform your own physicians."

He stared at her, and then spoke to the air. "Captain?"

A holographic screen appeared to the enforcer's side, displaying the profile of an older woman with mint green hair. "Well, it sure sounds quite reasonable," the bureau woman remarked with a small, pleasant smile. "If the Wolkenritter immediately hand over their weapons and accept the care of the enforcers now surrounding your position, they may remain under guard while their medic and master are escorted to our ship's medical bay."

Signum nodded her head at her counterpart. "Thank you."

The other woman hummed noncommittally. Her smile didn't quite reach her eyes, which never left Signum's.

The Blazing General dared to ask, "Would it be acceptable to turn over my sword to Testarossa?"

The blonde startled at being brought back into the discussion. "M-me?!"

Signum noted the hint of warmth that flickered across the captain's face. "That would be acceptable. If you would be so kind, Fate-chan?"

"Y-yes, Captain! Ah, excuse me, Signum..."

The knight smiled at the small mage. "My thanks, Testarossa. I am assured that I leave him in capable hands."

"Ja," intoned the sword.

"Naturally," droned Testarossa's axe. The mage blushed, and held the pendant-sized Armed Device protectively to her chest.

"Then!" barked Vita, whirling on the white-clad young mage; Takamachi something-or-other. "You'd better take good care of Graf Eisen, Takamachi Nanoha!"

"Eh?! O-oh, of course, Vita-chan!"

"Don't call me '-chan'! I'm over a thousand years older than you, brat!"

"Eeeeh?!"

The Midchildan guardian beast looked over at Zafira. "I suppose someone needs to hold onto your jewelry, too, big guy."

Zafira grunted, and weighed the option of handing Hayate over to Reinforce that he might divest himself of his gauntlets and greaves. Jewelry, indeed.

Shamal looked uncertain. After all, it wasn't like she had established herself a trusted rival in all of this mess. "Um..."

Takamachi piped up, "Oh, Yuuno-kun! You can trust him!"

"Uh?" stuttered the young boy present.

Testarossa looked to Signum and Shamal. "I would also vouch for him. He will take care of your device."

The boy blushed and shrank from the combined scrutiny of the Knights of Lake and Sword, but quickly straightened his back. "I'd be honored."

"Alright, alright!" Vita yelled, thrusting out her tiny fists side-by-side. "Hurry up and bind us! Jam limiters in us, throw us in the brig, whatever! Just help Hayate already!"

If the enforcer and his captain felt affronted by the demands of a hostile criminal, they gave no sign. "Amy, if you would kindly begin a transport for our two guests?"

* * *

><p>"Yo, big guy," Arf said.<p>

"What is it?"

"I had it wrong earlier. As a familiar or guardian beast or whatever, of course you'd worry more for the precious thing in your arms than your jewelry, right?"

Again with the jewelry nonsense. But setting that aside... "Your point?"

"I asked my master, and she's willing to loan me out for a bit. If you don't mind me carrying that girl, that is. Your support mage's arms look kind of noodley, and the enforcers are going to bind her hands, too."

"..."

"I haven't forgotten, you know. My master, with her Linker Core ripped out in that desert while I wasn't there. Or how your leader held onto her, kept her off the hot sand and safe from animals until I got there. Didn't hurt her any more when she had the chance, not even to keep her from fighting any more."

"â€|Please."

"No problem."

The enforcers moved in as Arf, girl in arms, moved back. As the mages laid binding after binding on the unresisting Guardian Beast, the uplifted wolves continued with telepathic speech.

{Thank you.}

{Don't thank me yet. I'm just paying back a favor. I still owe you one face-removal for my master getting hurt in the first place.}

{You wouldn't be a proper Guardian Beast or familiar otherwise. If I

have the opportunity after this, I will gladly allow you to vent your displeasure upon me.}

{Whaaat? Oh no, big guy. You don't get off that easily. After the first free shot, I expect you to fight back. I won't be satisfied taking it out on a guy who won't put 'em up.}

{Hmph. Then your vengeance will have to be satisfied with that one free shot.}

{Oo, you know exactly what to say to a girl. Give me a call when you get out of prison~!}

The wave of her tail as she turned and left was entirely too salacious.

End
file.